(Y1V4) - ZODIAC EXAM HIDDEN PLOT AND ITS RELATION TO KOJI

We know there was a pattern in which the VIPs were assigned, it has been revealed in V5 that you need 6 VIP names in total to crack the pattern. Ryuuen claimed that he found the pattern. How did he do that? He has 3 VIPs assigned from his own class, which leaves out 3 VIPs from outside classes. So he has to find some way to get those 3 VIP names. 1 VIP was Kushida. If you remember on the 2nd day, Ryuuen got a message from Kushida on his phone saying "Sorry last night". The previous night was the same instance when Kushida suddenly hugged Kiyo on the ship, when Kiyo was about to turn. What does this imply? It means the hug was fake, made in order to prevent Kiyo from turning and noticing Ryuuen and giving him time to hide. She was secretly meeting up with Ryuen during this time, and we know she had been dealing with him in Y1V4 since he knew she was the VIP. This was the time when Kushida revealed that she was the VIP and betrayed her class. Ryuen came from behind Kiyotaka to meet up with Kushida. If Kiyotaka would've turned, he would notice him and her betrayal would be exposed flat along with Ryuen. That is the reason she apologized to him the next day on the phone, because of her negligence.

Kiyo noticed this regardless, hence he had already expected Kushida would betray the class again in Y1V5.

Remaining 2 VIPs were from class B, given to Ryuuen by Kanzaki. If you check the results, Class B ended up with 0 points in total. At first glance, it seems class B didn't earn anything as they were neither targetted nor did they have any profit. However, remember that Ryuen made a wrong guess on a particular group? The Cow group. It was mentioned in V5 that Ryuen gave away 50 points to this group for free despite being aware of the root of the exam.
Why would he do this and harm his own class? Hirata and Horikita raised this point but they couldn't understand the incident.

The Cow group VIP list has been presented, must be a reason why so.

Let's have a look at it first:

A-Class: Yasumi Sawada, Naoki Shimizu, Haruka Nishi, Kenta Yoshida
B-Class: Yume Kobashi, Yui Ninomiya, Kihito Watanabe
C-Class: Yūya Yuki, Yuji Nomura, Mariko Yajima
D-Class: Kanji Ike, Airi Sakura, Ken Sudō, Chiaki Matsushita

Arrange these names in accordance to the Japanese Hiragana alphabetical order, we get it as Ike Kanji, Kobashi Yume, Sakura Airi, Sawada Yasumi, Shimuzu Naoki, Sudō Ken, Nishi Haruka, Ninomiya Yui, Nomura Yuji, Matsushita Chiaki, Yajima Maruko, Yuki Yūya, Yoshida Kenta, Watanabe Kihito.

So if we check this list and use the pattern for finding the VIPs given to us by the author we arrive at the answer that Yume Kobashi was the VIP of that group. The pattern for the VIPs arrangement in the groups was revealed in V5, i.e. the number of the surname of the student when arranged in Japanese alphabetical order corresponds to the number of the Zodiac

group. There are 12 Zodiac groups numbered from 1 to 12. Checking the list of the Cow group and using this pattern to tally the student surnames, Kobashi turns out to be the VIP, since she is 2nd in the alphabetical order for the Cow group, which is the 2nd group in the Zodiac groups order. This Yume Kobashi is from Class B. It means the student whom Ryuen made a wrong guess on, was actually from class B. Now go back to the results again. Class B ended up with 0 points. But the wrong guess made by Ryuen was on a class B VIP, meaning they had to get 50 points. So for them to end up with 0 points, they should've lost 50 points as well. Now check the results carefully. A class losing 50 points is essentially Outcome 3, where the traitor guessed correctly.

We have 5 instances of this according to the results i.e. Rooster, Pig, Rat, Horse and Monkey groups. However Rooster, Pig and Rat are from A and Horse is from D, as mentioned by Ryuen himself regarding A, and earlier on in the volume by Hirata about D. So the only group class B could've lost points on is the Monkey group. Does this group ring a bell? This was the name of the group whose exam Koenji ended on the first day by guessing the VIP correct.

So the VIP, which Koenji guessed, was from class B, not class C. That's how class B ended up with zero points. Coming back to the matter, Ryuuen basically gave away 50 points to class B for free. Why would he do that? Unless he gets something in return from class B, as only that way would it be an equal trade.
So we know that Ryuen got something out of class B from this action. If you remember, this happened on the 3rd day, for which the exam ended, and the very next day Ryuuen claims he found the pattern and knows the VIP. On the previous day, he also said that he knows the VIP of the Dragon group, and his class may be the one to win. This happened just the day after Kushida betrayed, and the day prior to the Cow group incident. Therefore, the conclusion is the person who Ryuen got the VIP names from has to be from the same group as him, as that group's exam had ended, and they got time to make negotiations. Kanzaki is from the same Dragon Group as Ryuuen. Also point to note that Ryuen needs 2 more VIP names to complete his pattern cracking mechanism at this point. So what happened is obvious. Kanzaki gave the VIPs of the already ended groups' i.e. Monkey and Cow, to Ryuen. If you remember, Ichinose was not willing to cooperate with Ryuuen despite taking damage because Ryuuen is untrustworthy. Ichinose not changing her approach is what prompted Kanzaki to make his move, as Koenji had already wrecked their class of 50 points, remember Monkey group. Koenji's actions sparked Kanzaki into betrayal, as he panicked that their class would have a net negative result.

He and Ryuuen had a deal behind the scenes. Kanzaki will provide Ryuuen with the VIP names of 2 groups, Cow and Monkey, since those groups' exams already. Ryuuen gives Class B 50 points by making a wrong guess on Cow Group, and ALSO leaving out the group Ichinose was in, because Kanzaki didn't want to get Honami involved in this, as he had betrayed her. If she came to know Kanzaki acted behind her back and did something she would disagree on, he would lose her trust. This was the reason Ryuuen did not target Kei despite him knowing she was the VIP. As it was mentioned, Ryuen waited for Kei's group's exam to end, before sending the target VIP names to the school. Why do you think, if Ryuen found the pattern, he waited for Kei's group's exam to end before making his move? Since he already should've known that Kei was the VIP. This is in fact the reason. The wrong guess on Cow Group was made on Ryuuen's orders, because it's mentioned in the same arc

that all of Ryuuen's classmates were obedient to him. So it was not a result of betrayal, but intentional. What if Ryuuen betrayed Kanzaki and targeted the Dog group which had a VIP from class B or targetted Kei? Kanzaki had the option of writing Kushida's name as the VIP before 21:30 hours, and thus score 50 points for their class. This way, Ryuuen loses Kushida's trust for the coming volumes since she didn't get the private points she wanted by achieving Outcome 1, he also loses out on his opportunity to amass private points via achieving Outcome 1.

So basically, Ryuuen left class B out because of his deal with Kanzaki. He left out Kei because Ichinose was present in the group. He left Kushida because he needed her trust. He targeted the rest. So him saying he was focusing exclusively on class A was a lie, cause he wouldn't have targeted Minami from class D otherwise, who was the VIP of the Horse group. Class D did not get saved because of Koenji, if Koenji hadn't attacked class B Ryuuen would've never gotten the chance to make a deal with Kanzaki. Then he could've never attacked Minami from class D. Then class D would've never lost the additional 50 points they did. This is how Ryuuen won the exam and Kanzaki betrayed Ichinose.

Tokito Hiroya is from the Cow group, according to the list given to us. It's highly likely he was the one Ryuuen ordered to make the wrong guess, and he's outraged because he didn't understand why that happened. He thought Ryuuen betrayed his class to Honami by not making proper guesses despite knowing the pattern. Because from a layman's perspective, it can seem that way. He just knew Ryuuen knew the pattern, he didn't think how. That's why he wants Ryuen to step down.

Also, we also know for a fact from V5 that Kiyotaka understood all this happened, since he said he pretended to not know the answer to why Ryuen made a wrong guess when Horikita brought it up in V5, and didn't feel like explaining it.

This entire deduction of Ryuuen's and Kanzaki's strategies is Ayanokoji's thought process.

(Y1V5) - Ayanokoji had chosen to race Manabu for 3 reasons.

First - He wanted to throw off Ryuuen's suspicion on Hirata, to make Ryuuen suspect Hirata is X. Ryuuen's thought process at the time in his monologue was that due to him starting to hunt for X, X must be panicking. And that making Kiyo use his abilities against Manabu was just a form of distraction X used at the last moment, because he panicked. Why did he assume X was controlling Kiyotaka? Because Kiyo directly arrived on the scene where Kei was bullied. From Ryuen's perspective, X is someone who operates behind the scenes through his pawns. It would be more efficient for him if he sent someone to do the acts instead of himself.

And besides, when he interrogated Manabe in V6, he understood that X was the one who leaked out Kei's past to them. From his perspective, for X to know about Kei so well he should be close to her, especially considering how much Kei wants to hide her past. And Hirata at that time was Kei's boyfriend. Hence what would be the conclusion Ryuen would

arrive at ? His thought process at the time was Hirata being X, sent Kiyotaka to snap the picture, and use it to blackmail Manabe further. And that Kiyo was working for Hirata.
This is why Ryuuen was trying to probe Kiyo during that iconic "are they fucking each other backstage" comment, to see if he can gain something from Ayanokoji in that moment, something like observing a weakness. He referred to Kei privately as "Hirata's woman" in V6, because he already had his suspicion of Hirata being X. Ryueen dropped Hirata's name when investigating the identity of X multiple times, even at the end of V5.

ALL of this was planned by Kiyotaka. He designated all of Ryuen's thoughts, and this had been a thing ever since Y1V4. The reason why he chose to go about Kei the way he did also had Manabe and Hirata factored into it.
Kiyo noticed that Hirata's ideology is deep down Machiavellian. Hirata deep down knows that life isn't all sunshine and rainbows. And that harsh means are many times required to achieve good results in the end. But it is his PTSD triggered guilt which in turn triggered his messiah complex: a state where he thinks he is obligated to act as everyone's savior. He wants to fix things, but can't because his PTSD prevents him from doing so. This is why he let Kiyo do whatever he wanted to Kei in V4, in the basement, and didn't even question him further when seeing that Karuizawa was okay.

He knew what Kiyo was gonna do was potentially unethical, but realised that what Kiyo desires as the end product is something good. This is the reason that while he let him do whatever he wanted, he refused to look into what exactly Ayanokoji was gonna do.
Hirata respects Kiyo a lot since Ayanokoji can take the decisions Hirata wanted to take but can't, due to his guilt. That's why he said Kiyo was similar to him in the V10 monologue, and that's what Kiyo was telling him to do in V11: become decisive.

Kiyo saw through his mentality right in Y1V4 (with prior observations in Y1V3) when he had the conversation with him, and realised that Hirata would happily play along with X's disguise without much question. And he was right, as portrayed in V5, Hirata just confirmed that Kiyo is X, and further explained that Kiyo didn't need to provide an explanation.

The reason why Ryuuen approached Koenji. Now that you know the V4 hidden plot, you also know that Ryuuen's statement about Koenji damaging his class in the Zodiac exam was a lie. Because Koenji actually helped Ryuuen. If not for Koenji damaging class B, Kanzaki would've never made his move. He never damaged Ryuuen's class. So why would Ryuen do that?
The answer is to get information. From the letters Kiyo sent in Ichinose's name, Ryuen deduced that X knew the deal between him and Kanzaki. So X also is entirely aware of what happened in V4.
If Ryuen says something absurd like "Koenji had damaged their class", X showing a surprised reaction is natural due to slipping up. He tried to catch that.

Koenji also realised what Ryuen was doing, and hence he played along as if he really damaged Ryuen's class, because he also wanted to know who X was. However, Kiyo didn't show any reaction or didn't slip up at all.
THIS is the reason why Year 2 Ryuen believes mental warfare wouldn't work on Kiyo, and also the reason why Koenji said he can't read Kiyo in Y2V2. Koenji failed to realise Kiyo was X in V7.

Also, the scene further proved Ryuen suspected Hirata as X, since he mentioned how such a justice oriented guy like Hirata did not arrive on the scene. He got the impression that Hirata sent out Kiyotaka to observe the incident unfolding as his pawn.

About Ryuen deduced that X knew about his deal with Kanzaki:

Ryuuen doesn't have any way to know about Ichinose's convo with Kiyo and Arisu's connection with him. And he saw it as X's move to provoke Ryuen. So it's natural for him to come to the conclusion that X knows the entire deal between him and Kanzaki, and is intentionally sending letters out in Ryuen's name to sabotage their relationship, all to provoke Ryuen.

(Y1V6) - Kiyo had spread rumors about Ichinose in Ryuuen's name at the end of the volume, regarding how she was illegally collecting private points. There are 5 reasons in total as to why he did that.

1. He provoked Ryuuen as he used Ichinose as a medium to bring out Ryuuen's desire to pursue him. We know Kiyo's plan was to bait Ryuen into colliding head on with him in a situation where Ryuen would completely lose using Kei as a distraction. He said this in V7 that all of Kiyo's actions were done to implant the idea of fighting Kiyo at the rooftop in Ryuen's mind.

2. He tested how the school would react to some random person spreading rumors like this. Since nothing much happened, he realized that it is relatively safe to spread rumors, this helped him deduce Nagumo's strategy to spread forced rumors in the first year himself to "save" Ichinose from Sakayanagi's claws in Y1V8, and also forging a strategy working in a completely similar way to Nagumo's which counters it.

3. If you remember before in that volume, Horikita and Ichinose had a conversation where Horikita termed Ichinose as a truly good person. Kiyo has stated that Ichinose's ideology is the polar opposite to his own ideology. He was curious whether Ichinose has reached the stage she did by truly sticking to her ideology or is she secretly a hypocrite. Which is why he had the school test her. He does something similar later on in the volumes like in V10.

4. Ayanokoji intentionally sent those rumors out in Ryuuen's name because Ryuuen and Kanzaki secretly had a deal back in V4, which is how Ryuuen got the VIP pattern. So sending letters in Ryuuen's name would create some rift between Ryuuen and Kanzaki at least to some extent. Remember Kanzaki was going to meet up with "someone" in his SS in V6 ? It was Ryuuen, Kanzaki mentioned it was for the sake of the class. This was the "stupid" Ryuuen was talking about at the end of the volume. Kanzaki met up with Ryuuen to interrogate him about the letters. This is the reason why Kanzaki termed Kiyotaka as their enemy in Y2V2, because after Kiyotaka revealed his academic ability, Kanzaki was highly suspicious of Ayanokoji being X and that he was the one who sent the letters slandering Ichinose. In the later volumes he believes in Ayanokoji capabilities to an extreme extent. So he is convinced that Ayanokoji is X.
We know Kiyo's strategy worked as Kanzaki and Ryuen had a bad relationship from that point as shown in volumes like 11.5.

5. Divert Arisu's attention from Kiyotaka to Ichinose, since she had revealed that she knows Kiyo is from WR just in the previous volume. He wanted to bait Arisu to focus her attention on Honami, that's why he said he anticipated Arisu's actions in V8. That was the bait planted by himself.
WRITE MORE REGARDING ARISU AND ICHINOSE BEING PLAYED BY AYANOKOJI

During Y1V6, aside from actually planting the cheats in Kushida's blazer himself, Ayanokoji meant to check Satou's and Suzune's blazers as well, especially Satou's. Kushida also has to answer questions, so there's a possibility she could use the same strategy as him to frame appropriate people. Rules of the exam state that the partners share their fates. I.e if one person is expelled the other would be expelled too. In a normal scenario, the two partners' scores tallied would result in cumulative score. But in special scenarios such as cheating, if Satou had been framed, Kiyo would be expelled alongside her too, since they share fates. This is a bug in the exam rules which Kushida could've exploited. Which brings us to what Kiyo could've done to get Kushida expelled if he actually intended.
He left the decision in Ryuuen's hands since Suzune had told him not to directly expel her. However, if he wanted to, he would frame Ike with the cheats, resulting in Kushida getting expelled as well. Point to note when he was going to expel Kushida he would've expelled Ike as well.